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PEOPLE

Freedom And TV News

COLUMBIA, MO. (UPI)—The constitutional guarantees of free speech and free press were written to protect the government and the public, not the news media, Reuven Frank, president of NBC News, said yesterday.

"To me," Frank said, "the First Amendment means that the American at home is guaranteed that whoever gathers his news does so freely, and whoever presents it does so for no conscious purpose than to present it. He must know that his news is neither gathered nor given my men and women seeking office or advantage by what they do with the news, or by those who think the news is the means to some better tomorrow only they discern."

In a speech for the Broadcast Day luncheon at the University of Missouri, Frank defended coverage by U.S. television networks of the Laos invasion. He said he had seen the same splicings of television film exhibited in Washington by Sen. Clifford Hansen (R-Wyo.) that had been described as "slanted" and subtle brainwashing" by some.

"The implications of conspiracy and brainwashing are a lot of unworthy nonsense . . . ," Frank declared.

But, he said, "suppose we had not used those pictures at all. Suppose the event was there to be filmed, and the film made, and we had not used it . . .

"Suppose that reporters, instead of reporting what they could, had chosen to cheer the troops on—a purpose often commended to us—by reporting back that it was a peachy idea, sure to defeat the enemy. The results would not have been different in Laos. They might well have been different in the United States."

A sense of shock and betrayal might have been the reaction of the American public that could have been "much more damaging to those in authority than what actually happened," he said.

Without news reports telling what actually was happening in Laos, the American public would have been surprised at the outcome, Frank maintained.

"Such surprise, I suggest, would have seriously damaged the relationship not between the public and the news media, or the government and the news media, but between the American government and the American public," Frank said